



## OVERVIEW

### Progress of the World's Women 2002: Vol.2

#### Tracking Gender Equality Worldwide

There has been progress in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment around the world – but the pace is too slow in many regions. Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest levels of achievement, primarily because of a devastating combination of national poverty, conflict and the effects of HIV/AIDS. These are among the findings of *Progress of the World's Women 2002*, the groundbreaking report on women's empowerment produced by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). This biennial report is the only one of its kind to track the world's commitment to gender equality.

The other major finding of the report is that the level of women's representation in national governments has been improving. The rise in women's share of parliamentary seats is primarily due to special measures – such as quotas – being introduced and is not tied to a nation's relative wealth or poverty. The Beijing Platform for Action (PFA), developed at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, calls for at least 30 per cent representation by women in national governments. Those countries that have introduced quotas of at least 30 per cent have seen substantial growth in women's representation.

The report shows that the countries with the highest levels of progress are developed countries—although there are many developed countries that don't make the list of highest achievers, mainly because of women's poor representation in national governments. In fact, despite the enormous difficulties confronting sub-Saharan Africa, at least 13 countries in the region, have higher rates of women's parliamentary participation than developed countries such as France, Japan, and the United States.

The data and statistics collected and analyzed in this report present a picture of women's empowerment in the new century, and illuminate what remains to be done to achieve true gender equality (see "Key Findings" in this packet). By looking at achievements in girls' and women's secondary school enrolment, literacy, non-agricultural wage employment and seats in national parliaments, *Progress* is able to show which countries are on the road towards empowering their female citizens and what factors influence achievement.

*Progress of the World's Women 2002* uses the indicators created for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of 8 goals established at a UN conference in 2000. These goals represent the values that world governments have agreed should guide global development: freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility. The ultimate goal is to end poverty, hunger and inequality, to free "the entire human race from want," as the Millennium Declaration states. As globalization continues to transform the world economy, these goals provide a structure to ensure that the benefits of globalization are distributed equally.

Goal 3 of the MDGs calls on nations to "promote gender equality and empower women." It builds on the work of women's advocates at various UN conferences in the 1990s, in particular the Fourth World Conference on Women, and the five year review of the Conference's Platform for Action. In

addition, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has played an important part in shaping international commitment to gender equality.

But progress in achieving the aims of the PFA and CEDAW has been uneven. The economic, social, political, legal and cultural structures that perpetuate gender inequality are still in place throughout the world and many countries lack the resources to implement changes that would benefit women.

Given these conditions, UNIFEM believes it is extremely important that governments expedite actions to fulfill commitments to women and that donor nations increase the support and resources necessary to fulfill Goal 3. Promoting gender equality and empowering women are more than mere phrases – UNIFEM shows in *Progress 2002* that achieving these ends improves the lives of everyone, not just women. And it shows how ending women's inequality can have a profound impact on many other national sectors.

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